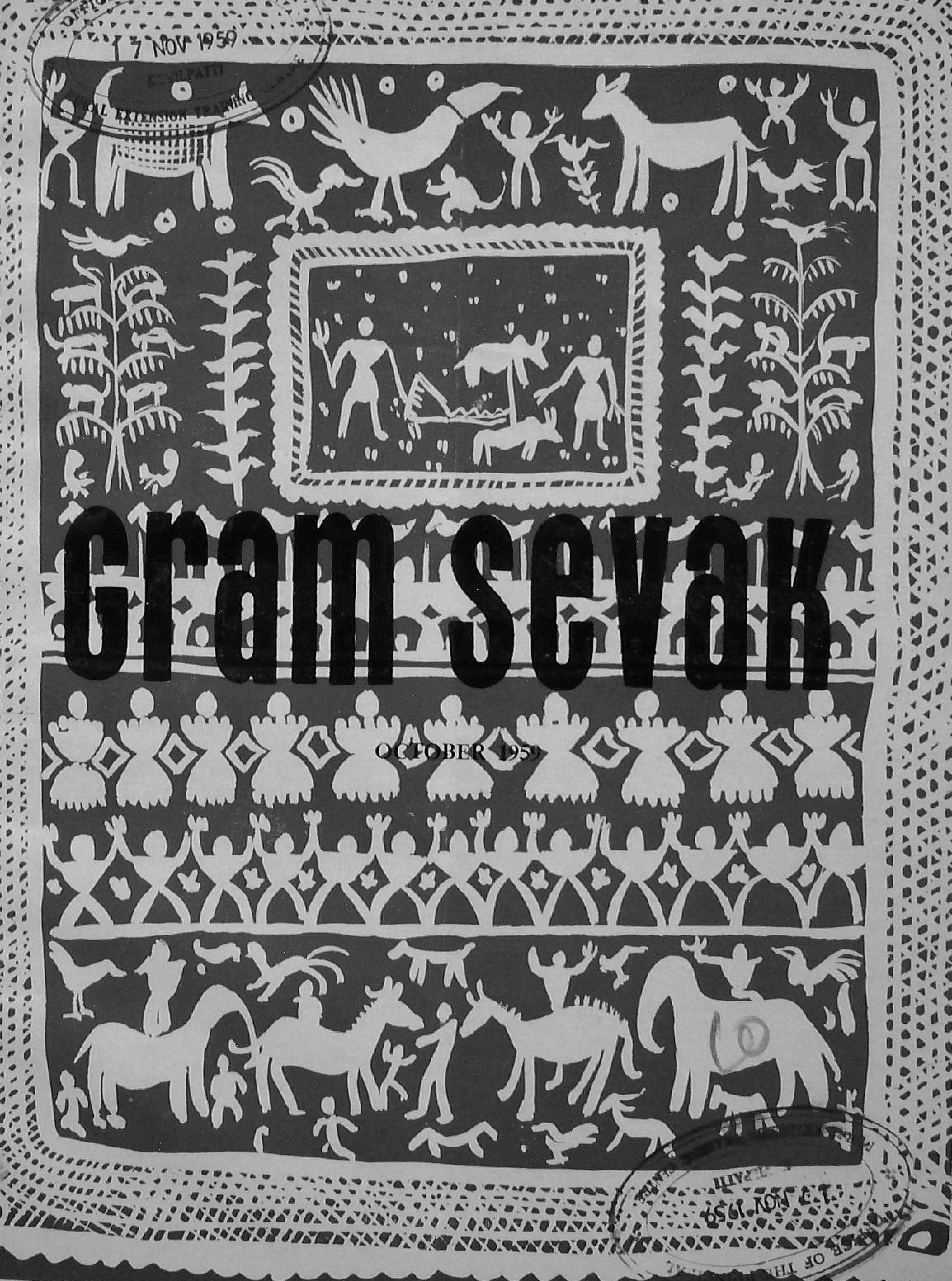

Gram Sevak

OCTOBER 1959

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RURAL EXTENSION TRAINING

So much to do, so little done

मज़दूर मंज़िल
ग्राम सेवक

GRAM SEVAK

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Seven Years of Pilgrimage

S. K. DEY

Pilgrimage is a process. It is not a consummation. One phase of the pilgrimage was over when we grew independent of alien domination. The other phase began soon after. The new phase was to usher in the freedom promised. Freedom can only be based on the triple charter of rights—

(1) The right to live,

(2) The right to work for a living,

(3) The right to receive what is earned.

The nation inherited from the past preachers and preachings in abundant numbers. Ideals before the nation soared and sky-rocketted. Between the preachings and practices the gaps yawned ever wider.

Five packed years rolled by. The period saw the installation and consolidation of a national Government, one manned by representatives chosen by the nation. But Delhi, the national capital and the headquarters of States are far away from the people. The people, the bulk 82 per cent of them, had been slumbering and slogging in the 550 thousand far-flung villages. These villages were hives of activities once, humming with the music of the mind, muscles and the spirit of our people. These had fallen into stagnation through centuries of disrepair and one way traffic towards the towns and cities that grew as carbuncles on the soil. The petty Government servant lorded it over the countryside. When asked how much he earned, he winked his eyes significantly. He mentioned the official salary as "*Jal-pan*". The real income he left for the imagination of those who chose to make the query.

THE FIRST FIVE YEAR PLAN

The First Five Year Plan had begun in April, 1951. The Plan was based largely on earlier thinking weighted towards the cities. Villages came in as peripherals. True, large sums of money were earmarked for multi-purpose projects and Grow More Food schemes. But even a child knows, these projects would benefit relatively small areas, spread over a long period of time. Grow More Food schemes suffered from inequity in design. These gravitated towards specially favoured areas and people. The realisation was still to come that food like health cannot be secured for one limb in isolation from others in an organism. Nation is an organism. If food production is to increase in bulk, the food producing population as a whole should be activated. It was still to be realised that food production called for efforts not merely in agriculture but in animal hus-

bandry, irrigation, co-operation, communication, public health, youth and women's programme, education and adult education. There had to be joint effort on all fronts if the impact was to be enduring, self-propelling, of significance.

ADMINISTRATION—THE PARADOX

In a country waking up after centuries, it is but natural that between the people and the Goverment, the Government would be the stronger partner. People would be dependent on the initiative flowing from Government, at least to start with. The Government, during alien rule, responded to single line impulses from Whitehall in London and Viceregal Lodge in New Delhi. The situation had changed since midnight August 15, 1957. The Whitehall was replaced by the people of India. The old mandate had disappeared. Power had become diffused. The new mandate based on democracy was still to emerge. Under the new Constitution of India, all vital matters of development in villages fell to the share of State Governments. The Centre, *vis-a-vis* the States, had been endowed with powers only to influence. In States, powers had to be shared under the Constitution between elected Ministers. Coordination in thinking and efforts, in a growing democracy, is a gradual growth through trials and errors.

Meantime the legacy inherited from the past were Departments of Government at the Centre and in the States which, but for law and order, existed mainly for merry-go-round. When these reached out for the people, there were mostly eddies and whirls gravitating back to the circle. Coordination as a process can be attempted only when there is a commonly accepted purpose. When the purpose is the ladder or the merry-go-round, coordination works spontaneously almost to a perfection. The new regime however made a different call. It was the service of the people. The service of the people and merry-go-round are features that stand at opposite poles. Situation grows worse when the "engineers" running the "power house" themselves work at cross-purposes. No wonder the new call made on the organisation meant only the expansion of the circle. The official habitat multiplied manifold. This happened as much in New Delhi as in State capitals. Taxes rose. But little flowed back to the people save paper and exhortations galore.

A WAY OUT

A new approach was the need of the hour. Who should work it out? Should it be a new organisation more akin to the needs of the people? Or, should it be the existing machinery reoriented to a new term of reference? The village is an organic whole. Its needs are inextricably inter-related. The village called for massive efforts on all fronts with but temporary adjustments in priorities. To do this over the subcontinent, through a new agency of Government, would mean in effect two parallel Governments in concurrent operation. It was obvious that the new agency would hardly have a chance to lift its head. The old agency was far too deeply entrenched in power to permit an alternative agency stealing a march over it. There was also the question of resources —both money and trained manpower. What was even more important, the servants of Government meant picked men. No better material could be had in India. True, the natural gravitation in Government was towards the ladder and the merry-go-round. But given a challenge, and the masters to harness the current, the agency had a phenomenal capacity for adaptation. The decision necessarily followed that the existing agency should be put to the new task. The National Extension Service formed the new pattern for the administrative organisation. Community Development came in as the concept and method. The development agencies of Government hitherto functioning in isolation from each other were called upon to work under a unified direction. October 2, 1952, the birthday of the Father of the Nation saw the inauguration — the new pilgrimage.

"THE SILENT REVOLUTION!"

Money is proverbially slow to move in any new pro-

gramme of Government. But the concept of the programme and the manner in which it brought the dreaded officials in touch with the people with open arms and shorn of armour, acted like a hypnotic spell. People poured in overwhelming numbers. The efforts offered a sight for the Gods. Believers in astrology, the talisman and the Alladin's Lamp, we gasped in wonder. "A silent revolution, a miracle is on", we shouted in delight. Organisations which prided on their monopoly of social service, looked down-cast. The official agency paraded itself in jubilation. Came universal demand for multiplication of the programme. The expansion came faster than the resources. Encomiums flowed from every direction—from Ministers, Members of Parliament and State Legislature, foreign visitors and the press alike. Technical Departments as also administrators from Commissioners to Sub-Divisional Officers, had been spectators at the beginning of the programme. The programme had developed by then a panoramic potential. It attracted the attention and interest of all onlookers. Members of the State Legislature and the Parliament grew more alive to the programme.

THE SCENE CHANGES

The original set of projects started in 1952 were confined to a very small number in every State. These were before the prying eyes of the nation. The staff could be trained with special attention. Work could be supervised from the centre down to the ground. When expansion took place, the programme encompassed within its orbit other functionaries from Commissioners to the Sub-Divisional Officers. Technical departments with their hierarchy from State Headquarters to the ground and representatives of the people from the Parliament to the Panchayat came equally into the programme. The old intensive attention was no longer possible either for training or for supervision. Besides technical skill and administrative efficiency in a democracy are features of organic growth. No wonder the programme threatened to grow into a routine, subject more to manuals of operation than to emotions and affinity of the mind and heart. Meantime, people began to lose their fear of the Government apparatus. It was an important objective of the Community Development Programme and marked no doubt a happy consummation. But, it brought in its trail fantastically rising curves of demands for facilities from Government.

BRICKBATS START FALLING

The countryside continued being dominated by the few strong men—strong in money, caste, or group politics. They had their counter-parts in the petty servants of Government. The unholy combination helped a section of the village community to have the lion's share of the limited resources that could be offered by Government. The "many" in villages had to be content with schools, health centres, communications and such other common facilities. Economic resources were too limited to be shared by the few with the many. Even co-operatives meant to offer organised strength to the weak were used largely by the powerful to add further to their powers The universal bouquet began to give place soon to brickbats in profusion. Even those who appropriated the lion's share in villages began to decry the programme. Partly, this was a sop to their conscience. Partly, this was so, because the programme with its limited resources acted but as appetiser to their growing ambitions. Sections of the press echoed the tune in an amusing chorus. "The Lamp has failed. Let us burn the witch-doctors in the stakes" was the feeling one could sense in the air.

HORIZON EXPANDS MEANTIME

The Community Development agency by this time had encompassed directly and indirectly, virtually the whole administration of Government. The impact of the growing demands from ground helped bring forth radically new policies for the Second Plan in all nation-building ministries both at the Centre and in the States. Ground orientation as against paper preoccupation was reflected in most key workers. Ministry of Food and Agriculture drew

up plans for seed farms, fruit nurseries, poultries, fisheries, fertilisers, compost and green manure, insecticides and other forms of assistance to the cultivators. Ministry of Health planned for primary health centres with associate maternity-*cum*-child welfare centres in every block besides plans for eradication of malaria, for drinking water and then sanitation schemes. Ministry of Education planned for growth of library services, primary and secondary education and social education, on a countrywide scale in terms of the Block as the new administrative unit. The same pattern of thinking conditioned the approach to the Second Plan on village industries in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and for village housing in the Ministry of Works, Housing and Supply.

Other ministries also continued coming in. Even the new Ministry of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs has begun making blockwise plans for development of child art, cultural activities for youth and elders and propagation of scientific outlook and the results of research amongst village people. The thinking on the Third Five Year Plan is being governed by a basic minimum of services and amenities in all aspects of life for the 550 thousand villages of India. While the other ministries in the Centre plan for trained manpower, supplies and services to aid the people, the Ministry of Community Development has been busy developing its resources at the fastest possible pace for training and orientation of all personnel—administrative and technical—from the State headquarters down to the ground. The apex Institute for Study and Research in Community Development at Mussoorie, the Orientation Training Centres, the Social Education Organisers and the Mukhya Sevikas Training Centres, and the enormous expansion in progress for training of co-operative personnel are all being designed to offer education in democracy and training in methodology as regards a "People's programme".

PEOPLE'S STATE *vis-a-vis* WELFARE STATE

Till lately the programme has been almost exclusively a Government Programme to assist people. If the programme is to grow and democracy to be real, it is the people's organisation which has to be more overwhelming in character and vitality. Government agency has to act but an instrument to carry out the behest of the people transmitted through representative institutions. A people's State will invariably be a Welfare State. A Welfare State not run by the people themselves is not a People's State. Even Welfare in such a State cannot be an enduring feature. History is replete with examples to illustrate this phenomenon. The current world society will offer further corroboration. A People's State and an administration controlled through long distance transmission lines are features that exclude each other. It is even more so in an underdeveloped economy where the bulk of the people are steeped in darkness. Democracy confined only to the Parliament and the State Legislature in a subcontinent such as ours, can neither grow nor endure for long. There is thus the crying call for extension of democracy.

THE FATEFUL DECISION

Demands grow geometrically along side for services and assistance of Government. These call for a clear and urgent decision. One of the decisions could be to enlarge the Government apparatus. This would involve a number of Government servants in every village to look after the volume and complexity of demands. This galaxy of Government servants in a backward economy such as ours is clearly beyond our resources. Besides, the system will call for a supervisory organisation of a very complex character. The experience needed is impossible to secure in present conditions. It will be even more so to maintain the efficiency of such a supervisory apparatus except on the basis of fear. Fear and democracy do not mix together. Democracy practised through the galaxy of Government servants through long distance control may offer a pastime for some. A backward economy cannot afford such a luxury. The road will then be clear for such a democracy

to succumb to totalitarian control of one kind or the other. Democracy either way will be the inevitable casualty. The administration of Government has been squeaking under the weight of these contradictions. A substantial number of workers from the centre to the ground have borne the brunt of this dilemma over their bleeding hearts. They have, strange as it may seem, been more eager to take a new plunge in the direction of the logic unleashed.

NEW INSTITUTIONS OF PEOPLE

At the cross road, Community Development Movement has begun accordingly to chart on a new road. Democratic decentralisation is the new concept. Thus comes a new delimitation in the approach of the programme. On October 2, 1959 the State of Rajasthan will be the first to have transformed her entire structure of administration in the State. This will be followed by Andhra on November 1, the anniversary of the Andhra State. The stagnant District Boards will stand abolished. So also will all other institutions below the State Legislature except the village panchayat. Village panchayats will send their elected Sarpanches to the new statutory body known as the Block Panchayat Samiti. The Samiti will have other coopted members representing women, depressed and scheduled classes. The body will have a President and a Vice-President. The administrative personnel in the block besides the budget and other resources of Government, will be placed at the disposal of this new body. The Community Programme along with all individual departmental programmes of Government in the Block will be vested in this body. The Presidents of Block Panchayat Samitis together with the M.Ps. and the M.L.As. in the district will constitute the Zilla Parishad. The Zilla Parishad in collaboration with the Collector and the technical departments at the district will offer guidance and assistance to the Block Panchayat Samitis without controlling them. This is the constitution. This is in the process of implementation round the clock in 9 out of 14 States in India. Other States also are coming in rapidly with similar legislation and preparations for the change over.

FROM PARLIAMENT TO THE PANCHAYAT

The purport is that the State Legislature will travel from the State headquarters down through the District and the Block to the Village panchayat. The new institutions, as people's organisations, will be responsible for planning and implementation of programmes approved in the State Legislature. The suzerainty enjoyed by local government agencies will end. These will be subject to support and control by democratic institutions of people all along the line with adequate charter of powers. Thus will democracy travel from the Parliament to the Panchayat. Thus will the keys taken over by the select leaders at Delhi on the fateful midnight of August 15, 1947, be on their journey back to the people. But democracy also has a stomach-only more vocal, more exacting. The stomach has to be served without the man being silenced in the process. Then alone can democracy lead to its ultimate consummation — Freedom — Destination man.

(To be Continued)

THERE IS NO SHORT CUT

BY YUDHISHTAR

THERE IS A Tamil Proverb that a tree laden with ripe fruit is often pelted with stones. I am afraid, the Community Development programme today is finding itself in a similar predicament. Wayfarers are many. The orchard is open. And the fruits are tempting. Among the way-farers there are some who are authorised to do this random sampling but there are a few poachers among them. There is, therefore, nothing surprising that the programme of Community Development should have been attacked from many fronts. Perhaps in no other field of State activity has there been such persistent and close scrutiny of the day-to-day developments. Year after year the Programme Evaluation Organisation highlights its defects and shortcomings. The Parliament and the State Legislatures hold special debates. Newspaper editorials have never slackened their interest in discussing its techniques and objectives, its performances and its frustrations. VIPs from all parts of the world have poured out their own suggestions. Starting essentially as an educational programme, where criticism is always welcomed, self-criticism is considered no less important in steering the programme clear of complacency. Some of the programme's persistent critics are to be found among the field workers themselves. This is, in my opinion, India's greatest contribution in the domain of a Government-sponsored programme of Community • Development. But to call this an *official* programme would amount to calling Calcutta "a Government City" because it is the seat of the State Headquarters. It is true that Community Development, specially in rural areas, was recognised as an official responsibility with the inauguration of the programme on October 2, 1952. But it has been clear from the very beginning that the official machinery would only act as a catalytic agent, leaving the management of community life to the non-official agencies concerned.

The programme started in 1952 with the B.D.O as the pivot of Block activity. Soon he was assisted by a Block Advisory Committee. Then came the Block Development Committee whose decisions were no longer advisory. The Block Panchayat Samiti is now to be the hub of all activity, with the B.D.O as the Chief Executive officer. In a matter of seven years there comes the transfer of power from an officer appointed by the State Government to an elected body of the Panchayats.

PERSPECTIVE VIEW

Let us now take a perspective view of the programme—how it started, what it stood for and the nature of its working. It started as a corollary to our political freedom. It stood for economic and social justice to the 82 per cent of our people. It leaned heavily on the Constructive Programme of Gandhiji and sought to convert it into a State programme for the people. It had an ambitious ideal to help in the change-over from a Police State to a Welfare State. It demanded of the officials a new purposive role in their functioning. It demanded of the people a new sense of community life.

Its first two years were consumed in building up a huge scaffolding—training of staff, village surveys, huge paper

work and unspent monies. And yet when the Development Commissioners met in May, 1954 they decided to cover the whole country by the end of the Second Five Year Plan. The Prime Minister called this "a very brave decision" and took it "that the men who came to this decision did so realistically and knowing fully the nature of the task.

SENSE OF ARRIVAL

There was a wave of optimism in the third year of the programme and the "sense of arrival" was very marked when Development workers met again next year in May, 1955. A lakh of villages had been converted and they felt that they had won the first round. But there were obvious gaps in the programme—in the field of cottage industries, local institutions, women's welfare and social relations. Nor were the non-official agencies brought into the picture. Co-ordination between the official and the non-official agencies was yet to be worked out.

As the programme coverage increased, the inevitable system of checks and counter-checks and sanctions from above choked its arteries. Co-ordination became impossible in the absence of team-work. The hierarchy became unmanageable. This could only be checked by training the staff in a new methodology and orienting them with the team-work spirit. The workers at various levels were put through specially devised training schemes. The training programme for the Project workers became a major function of the planners.

TRAINING IN SOCIAL ENGINEERING

Indeed, instead of developing the community directly, the planners at first found themselves raising a vast army of paid workers. In 1952 the country did not have a band of trained workers; today we have. A large number of Training Centres for Gram Sevaks and other Extension officers had to be planned all over the country. Even the Instructors had to be found and trained. Proper curricula had to be worked out. This was a role which only a revolutionary, political body would have dared to undertake. And it fell to the lot of the Ministry of Community Development to train these men and women of varying capacities and background in the new science of social engineering.

The status-consciousness among our Government servants—at least in the Community Blocks is a thing of past history. The white-collar labour still commands some respect in our countryside. But the Development staff has initiated a new tradition which has worried the local power-conscious politician. The Project worker who was out to involve the people has now involved himself. This may be cited as a major contribution which the programme has made to the body politic.

FUNDAMENTAL AND ARM-CHAIR

The charges against the working of the programme cover a wide field. Some of these are well-founded and relate to fundamentals; others relate to methodological and human imperfections and may be equally well-founded, though not fundamental. Still others are based on ignorance, pure and simple—from arm-chair critics who have never spent a single night in a village and whose knowledge is based on hearsay. Charges relating to fundamentals are: The programme has not developed the spirit of self-reliance among villagers. It has not aroused mass enthusiasm. Its economic impact is negligible. Its social education programme is weak. It has done little for cottage industries. It is temperamentally unsuited to function as a social organisation. These are listed only as samples. There may be many more. Let me analyse them to find out the truth. It is true villagers have not developed a sudden tendency to become self-reliant as a result of the programme. The deep dent caused by centuries of neglect and apathy has to be filled in. In the first seven years of a programme like this, one cannot expect to change the entire national outlook. It is a safe bet that our villagers will continue to depend on Government help and assistance for a long time

to come. This should not mean absence of self-reliance on the part of those who have successfully carried on without outside help for centuries against incessant foreign invasions and irresponsible foreign rule. One should not forget that the villagers have always been ready to do their part and it is not unoften that the Government had lagged behind in doing theirs. The road is a very long one. There is no short cut.

OTHER SIDE OF THE MEDAL

The villagers feel very disturbed that there should be a double standard—one for the towns and another for the countryside. Why should they get sentimental over a programme based on "matching grants" while the Government gives preferential treatment to the urban areas? Often villagers are saddened over the thought that electricity for production use is denied to them while it is easily available for every purpose in urban areas. Villagers may not be literate but they have a keen sense of social justice.

FROM THE STATES

ANDHRA PRADESH: Considering the large coverage of the Community Development programme in the State (which is now 73% of the rural population) a committee of legislators has been appointed to examine the working of the programme in select representative blocks and to submit a report of their observations.

* * *

Steps have been taken to make green leaf available freely wherever reserved forests exist, and for the supply of water for raising green manure after the harvest of the main crop. Much of the success would depend on the timely and adequate supply of chemical fertilizers and of iron and steel for agricultural implements.

BIHAR: Instructions have been issued regarding organisation of Shramdan campaigns in the Panchayat areas particularly for minor irrigation schemes, contour bunding, repair of *kutcha* roads. etc. A pilot project scheme of rural life insurance has been inaugurated at Bihar Shariff.

DELHI: A scheme for the installation of 25 tube-wells to be taken over and managed by co-operative societies has been finalised.

PUNJAB: To improve maternity services in block areas, it has been decided to impart training to local *dais* in the health Centres functioning in the blocks.

130 Young Farmers were given practical training in improved agricultural practices. Instructions were also given with regard to the maintenance of farm accounts. Audio-visual aids were used to make the programme effective and interesting.

UTTAR PRADESH: Cash realisation of Panchayat taxes in U.P. during the year 1958-59 was beyond all expectations. It amounted to over a crore of rupees as compared to only Rs. 57 lakhs in 1955-56, Rs. 34 lakhs in 1956-57 and Rs. 76 lakhs in 1957-58. Arrears of Panchayat taxes were also brought down to Rs. 3½ crores on 31-3-1959 as compared to Rs. 4½ crores in March, 1958. These arrears have been pending for the last 10 years. An attempt has also been made to recover arrears of Panchayat tax in the shape of manual labour, but Gaon Sabhas adopted this course rather sparingly. The total tax realisation during 1958-59 in the shape of Shramdan was Rs. 7½ lakhs. In a number of blocks and Gaon Sabhas all arrears of Panchayat tax were completely wiped out.

WEST BENGAL: Elections for constituting the first statutory Gram Panchayats were conducted in fifteen blocks of this State during April. The entire staff including the Gram Sevaks of the Blocks concerned were mobilised for this particular work.

PEOPLE'S INSTITUTIONS

RAJASTHAN is the first State to implement the programme of 'Democratic Decentralisation' in its entire area which the State spectacularly inaugurated on October 2, last.

Considerable progress has been made in the implementation of the programme for democratic decentralisation during the last one year. Nine States have either enacted, or are in the process of enacting, necessary legislation.

The programme of democratic decentralisation aims at entrusting the planning and execution of the developmental programmes to people's institutions, which can mobilise the local, human and material resources on the basis of self-help and self-reliance.

The programme was formulated because, it was felt that, to make the Community Development programme a people's programme, it was not only desirable but essential that the people themselves should not only plan and execute the developmental programmes but also provide the necessary stimulus.

Recommendations in regard to the programme of democratic decentralisation were made by the Balwantrai Mehta Study Team set up by the Committee on Plan Projects in 1957. The Team reviewed the position and suggested that the responsibility for the planning and execution of the developmental programmes should be exercised by the popular representatives of the area, that the Government should devolve its responsibilities in regard to the developmental programmes on to the popular institutions, reserving to itself the functions of guidance and supervision and higher planning.

These popular institutions, the Study Team recommended, should be the panchayat at the village level, the panchayat samiti at the block level and the zila parishad at the district level.

VILLAGE LEVEL

At the village level, the existing principal institution of the people is the panchayat. Composed of the people themselves, and helped by functional sub-committees and associate organisations, as approved by the Mysore Conference on Community Development, it is the best equipped institution to plan for the development of the village in accordance with the wishes and aspirations of the people. All State Governments are now taking steps to strengthen the panchayats administratively and financially.

At the higher levels are to be the institutions at the Block and district levels. The National Development Council, which accepted COPP report's recommendations, left it to the individual States to decide upon the exact form of decentralisation, as suited to local conditions and requirements. It presumed that decentralisation would be achieved gradually by stages.

The pattern of legislation enacted, or being enacted, by the State Governments to bring into being higher formations of local self-Government has, consequently, varied. While Uttar Pradesh and Bombay propose to keep the Block Committee in its existing position as an advisory body and introduce the scheme of democratic decentralisation at district level, some other States, *e.g.*, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Madras and Mysore have provided, or are providing, for a three-tier system, including popular institutions at Block or taluka level.

PANCHAYAT SAMITIS

The panchayat samitis which, under the scheme, are to replace the Block Development Committees, are to consist of all the directly elected sarpanches of the village panchayats in the area, in addition to representatives of special interests, such as Scheduled Castes and Tribes and women. The power to co-opt representatives of special interest is to vest not in the Government, but in the members of the panchayat samitis themselves. They are to handle more and more development activities at present undertaken by the development departments at the Block level, exercise supervision over the activities of the

(*Continued on page* 13)

Our Agricultural Workers

India is the seventh largest country in the world when measured by land area and the second largest in terms of population. About 70 per cent of her people, or roughly 250 million, depend directly on agriculture for a living. The economic position and problems of these people have been carefully documented in a report by the Ministry of Labour entitled "Agricultural Labour—How they Work and Live." The report is based on a survey of 11,000 agricultural labour families in 800 villages selected from all of India on the basis of stratified random sampling. The following material has been gleaned from that report. The survey was made in 1950.

The average size of cultivators' holdings was 7.5 acres and the average rural family consisted of five persons. The average daily wage of the adult male casual worker in agriculture was As. 17.5. Women worked for As. 11. The average annual income of an agricultural labour family, including returns for non-agricultural labour was Rs. 447.

In order to assess the adequacy of annual income in terms of the level of living, it is necessary to examine annual expenditure and their distribution. Annual living expenses for these 11,000 families amounted to Rs. 461. The total consisted of food Rs. 393 (85.3 per cent), clothing and footwear Rs. 29 (6.3 per cent), shelter, fuel, lighting and miscellaneous items Rs. 39 (8.4 per cent). In addition, each family spent Rs. 7 on ceremonies as distinct from living expenses.

It is obvious that there is scarcely any opportunity for exercising choice as regards goods and services for which money is spent. The cost of the bare necessities of life for many families can not be met from their meagre income and the labourer resorts to borrowing. Because of his slender resources, the facilities for borrowing are severely limited and the cost extremely high. It is against this background that the level of living must be viewed.

Average debt per family amounted to Rs. 47, or about 10 per cent of the annual family income. But for the families which were actually in debt, 45 per cent of the total number, the average amount was Rs. 105, or more than 20 per cent of their annual income. When income permits no margin over bare living costs, such a debt becomes intolerable, and universal bankruptcy is avoided only by the system of barter which exists in many villages. The estimated total debt of agricultural labour families in India at the time of the survey was of the order of 80 crores of rupees.

The main source of borrowings was the money-lenders, the time-honoured financiers of rural India, who often charge a commission amounting to 25 or 30 per cent of the loan. They accounted for 36 per cent of the loans, with employers providing 21 per per cent. Only one per cent was provided by co-operative societies, nearly 6 per cent by shop-keepers, and the balance (36 per cent) by relatives and friends.

Housing is an important component in the level of living. Agricultural labourers lived mostly in *kutcha* houses with mud walls and thatched roofs. Nearly 90 per cent of the families owned their houses, while 8 per cent occupied rent-free houses and two per cent paid nominal rents. Money spent on house repairs or rent was less than one per cent of total expenditure. More than half of the houses consisted of one room, while 22 per cent contained two rooms. Only 17 per cent were larger. Surroundings were often insanitary, with cattle and poultry accommodated in and around the houses. Such conditions are not conducive to an optimistic outlook, and it is small wonder that the Government is doing everything possible to strengthen agriculture and to improve the lot of the villagers.

It seems appropriate to conclude with a quotation which was used as a sort of frontispiece for the Ministry of Labour report. It is from "Labour in Agriculture—An International Survey" by Louise E. Howard.

"For millions of persons born in rural districts there is no escape from an agricul-

(*Continued on page* 13)

LETTER TO CHILDREN

In a "Letter to Children" appearing in the "Assam Tribune", Kakaideo writes about School Co-operatives. Our Project workers and others associated with our Programme should benefit from this experience of a neighbouring country.—ED.

HAVE YOU heard of school children running their own tuck-shop? Oh, I am sorry, you may not have come across the word, 'tuck-shop". Well, a tuck-shop means a shop selling sweets and snacks. In the Soviet Union a number of schools now have tuck-shops run by the children themselves. These are known as school co-operatives.

It all started in Lithuania where are now co-operatives in 82 schools covering five thousand children. Moldavia, the Ukraine and parts of the U.S.S.R. have since followed suit. Model rules worked out in Lithuania are being used in all these co-operatives. Under these, any member of the public can become a member on reaching 14. Entrance fee is one rouble, and a share costs ten roubles.

The school co-operative is quite an independent unit and belongs to the local district co-operative society. The members of the school co-operative elect a managing board of five and an auditing commission of three. They are usually senior form pupils. In some schools shopping and canteen commissions are also elected.

If the turnover of a school co-operative exceeds 10,000 a month, there is a paid assistant. Otherwise the pupils themselves perform the service, in groups of three or four, which are changed every fifteen days. Business is usually done before lessons, during the lunch break and after school.

The managing board supervises all the work, maintains contact with the co-operative supply depots, sees to it that enough goods are available and that meals do not lack variety. The district co-operative supplies the necessary equipment, stock and turnover capital, and allows an 8 to 10 per cent discount on the price of goods.

In this way the school co-operatives can build up capital reserves. Under the rules, the profits, after payment of tax, are divided as follows: up to a fifth for members, dividends, a fifth for members' recreation facilities, up to a tenth for bonuses to the most active members, and the remainder—not less than half—to replenish stocks and so on.

Many school co-operatives have a fairly large budget. Their profits are also considerable. This provides for excursions, sporting equipment, musical instruments and amateur art activities.

While starting these tuck-shops these school co-operatives are not unmindful of the members' studies. In some of them it is the rule that if a member slacks in his studies he may be expelled from the co-operative and his share returned to him. So if somebody has the idea of spending too much time in his own tuck-shop and eating ice-cream instead of studying, then he'd better think twice.

RAJASTHAN GIVES THE LEAD

ALTHOUGH Andhra Pradesh was the first State to try the experiment of democratic decentralisation in 20 Blocks, at the rate of one Block in each district, with effect from July 1, 1958, the first State to implement the recommendations of the Balwantrai Mehta Study Team throughout the State is Rajasthan.

Under the Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1959, the State Government are setting up Panchayat Samitis in all the 122 existing Community Development Blocks and the 110 "shadow" Blocks—i.e. areas not covered by the C.D. Programme—and Zila Parishads in all the 26 districts.

The panchayat samiti will replace the Block Development Committee at the Block level, and will exercise supervision over the activities of the panchayats. The range of activity of the samitis is sufficiently wide. Yet more and more activities at present undertaken by the various development departments in the Block areas are to be taken over by the panchayat samitis.

The panchayat samiti is to consist of all the directly elected sarpanches of the village panchayats and Tehsil Panchayats in its area, in addition to representatives of special interests like the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, women and Krishi Pandits. The power to coopt these special representative would rest not with the Government but with the members of the panchayat samitis. M.L.As. of the area will be associate members of the samiti, without the right to vote.

The panchayat samiti's tenure will be of three years. In order, however, to ensure the election of able and experienced persons as members, the first panchayat samitis would work for 1½ years only. During this time, it is hoped, elections to all panchayats would be completed in the State. The pradhan and up-pradhan of panchayat samitis would be elected by the members. The panchayat samitis, it has been provided, will work through standing committees, the minimum number prescribed being 3. These will be incharge of the production programmes, the social services, finance and taxation and administration.

FUNDS FOR PANCHAYAT SAMITIS

The samiti is to be provided with such funds from Government revenue as would enable it to carry out its obligations. It would also be vested with powers to levy taxes to augment its resources for undertaking other developmental activities. The taxes to be levied by the panchayat samiti will, however, be separate from those to be levied by the village panchayat. The extent to which the panchayat samiti or the village panchayat is able to raise its resources will determine the measure of success, and also indicate the element of responsibility and its activity.

The panchayat samiti will have full freedom in framing its budget or formulating its plans for development. When a decision has been taken by the samiti, it would devolve on the Vikas Adhikari, i.e. the B.D.O. in the Block areas and the Tehsildar in the "shadow" Blocks, to implement it in right earnest.

The Vikas Adhikari, helped by a team of the extension officers, or the available field staff in the "shadow" Blocks, is to work under the direction of the panchayat samiti. The panchayat samiti is expected to make full use of the technical and administrative assistance provided by the State through its various departments. In so far, however, as technical matters are concerned, the advice of the technical departments is to be final.

ZILA PARISHAD

The zila parishad is the house of elders of the district. It consists of the chairmen of the panchayat samitis in the district, M.Ps. and M.L.As. of the area, President of the Central Cooperative Bank, and the district collector as the ex-officio member, without the right to vote. Other District-level officers have the right to participate in the proceedings. The parishad is to work as the supervisory

and coordinating body. It would examine the budgets of all the panchayat samitis and distribute among the samitis in the district the *ad hoc* grants allotted to the district by the State Government. It has been provided that the zila parishad can return the budget to the panchayat samiti with its observations regarding the modifications to be made therein. A time limit has been prescribed, within which the zila parishad is to return the budget to the panchayat samiti. In the event of its failure to do so, it has been provided that the collector can empower the panchayat samiti to incur expenditure on committed items.

The position of the collector, who is to be the district development officer of the Parishad, is pivotal. As a representative of the Government, it is his responsibility to see that the village panchayats, the panchayat samitis and the zila parishads grow in a healthy manner, receiving support and allegiance of all Government officers. He is also to ensure proper coordination and to see that that the plans for the district are properly drawn up in conformity with the broad framework of the State plan. It is also his responsibility to see that the decisions of the zila parishad are properly implemented.

PEOPLE'S INSTITUTIONS

(*Continued from page* 9)

panchayats and provide services concerned with almost every aspect of rural life.

To enable them to discharge their functions regarding development work, the panchayat samitis are to be provided with such funds from Government revenues which would enable them to carry out their obligations.

The zila parishad, the people's institution at the district level, is to be like a house of elders of a district. It is to consist of the Chairmen of the panchayat samitis in the district, Members of Parliament and State Legislatures of the area, the Collector and such other officers as are nominated by the Government. It is to be a supervisory and coordinating body, approving the budgets of all panchayat samitis, but not modifying the proposals submitted by them.

The implementation of the programme of democratic decentralisation, it is recognised will throw greater burden on the administrative agency. The State officials will not only have to work in accordance with the wishes of the people, but also to establish sound traditions and healthy conventions.

The programme also calls for a reorientation of the people's representatives, who will have to realise their limitations and responsibilities in raising resources, formulating plans and ensuring the maximum co-operation.

Rajasthan, which is the first State to undertake the experiment on a State-wide scale, launched in April last an ambitious programme of orientation training to officials and non-officials who, in turn, have trained, or are training, 5,000 Panches and Sarpanches. These Panches and Sarpanches are to man the Panchayat Samitis at the Block level. The State Government plans to tell the largest number of people in the State through audio-visual aids, about the importance and implications of the scheme for democratic decentralisation by the end of the year.

OUR AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

(*Continued from page* 10)

tural career. While other industries are selective and attract roughly that number of candidates who can find accommodation, while suffering only from unforeseen changes in employment levels which, of course, may be very violent and cause extreme disturbance at certain epochs as at present, agriculture starts with too many candidates; neither selection nor rejection is possible, for where would the rejected go? That old necessity of maintenance, the old law of existence must somehow be made to function."

(*L. E. CARD in Agricultural Letter No. 44 of the Illinois in India*)

VIKAS MELAS

SHANKER RAM

INDIA HAS a rich and long tradition of Melas. Confluence of sacred rivers, famous temples, birth places of great men were the holy venues for such Melas which were held mainly for spiritual knowledge. They also provided opportunities for healthy recreation, exchange of views, sale of goods and meeting with kith and kin. Philosophers, religious preachers and saints used to attend such Melas and give their thought-provoking discourses to thousands and lakhs of people. Even 'Rajas' and 'Maharajas' considered it their sacred duty to visit such Melas to give Darshan to their subjects and have 'Darshan' of Sadhus' and 'Mahatmas'. In fact in old days Melas were the centres of art, culture and learning. Unfortunately those old values of Mela have now greatly changed. They are now used as devices of cheap recreation and the educational value has almost disappeared.

Vikas Mela which is primarily held for the villagers is an attempt to revive those old traditions. Although the scope of Vikas Melas is limited, it has the same high objective to impart useful knowledge and healthy recreation to the community. It is generally organised at the Block level and serves as an effective medium for mass education. It has become annual festival of the Block.

ADVANTAGES

Almost every important item of the programme of Community Development is discussed and presented in the Vikas Mela. Agricultural exhibitions are organised to arouse interest in the farmers to grow more food; cattle shows are held to make people learn the importance of improved breed; games and sports are organised for imparting lessons in health and group action and cultural programmes are arranged to relax and remove drudgery of life. Different competitions and rewards to the winners create interest and incentive. Organisation of the Mela by the people develops in them leadership and organising capacity. Discussion on different subjects makes people realise their problems and seek their solution.

The success of the Mela very much depends on advance planning. Since it requires joint efforts of different functionaries and help of the officers in the district they are to be mobilised well in time for the common purpose. People are also to be involved at every stage to avoid its ending in a government show. Involving people means securing their willing co-operation by developing in them a sense of belonging for the Mela. The extension workers should remain in the background and they should help and guide the villagers to organise the Mela themselves.

The timing for the holding of the Mela is also very important. It should not clash with the busy agricultural season. Extreme months of winter and summer should also be avoided. To make it a permanent feature it may be associated with some festival. But it may not be advisable to attach it with some traditional Mela lest its whole effect may be lost. In traditional Melas people's centre of attraction is music, magic and circus whereas Vikas Mela mainly aims at change of attitude and transfer of knowledge.

EXHIBITION

Exhibition forms one of the most important features of the Mela. Preparation of good exhibits matters a great deal but its proper display matters more. Out of date, impractical, rusted and damaged articles should not be displayed for the sake of show or as gap filler. This will have no educative value; rather create an adverse effect. Field demonstrations of certain exhibits create deeper impression on the mind. Advantages of heavy plough or of low water lift should better be demonstrated in actual working.

Explanation of the charts and models by the guide is of utmost importance. The

(*Continued on page* 15)

PROGRAMME PATTERN

The Central Government has recently asked the States to expedite formation of marketing co-operative societies. They, have also been advised to appoint small committees to revise and simplify the co-operative law in pursuance of the decisions of the National Development Council.

* * *

The Union Government's Supplementary Credit Scheme, its to be tried in 200 blocks covering about 4,000 families. The scheme, with a provision of Rs. 8 crores, envisages credit to small farmers, based on his production plan and potential. The Union Government has requested the State Governments to join in the implementation of the scheme through the co-operative banks.

* * *

A Long Drain 31-mile has been dug out last month by the voluntary labour of the people of 36 villages in the Mewat area of Gurgaon district. The digging work has been accomplished by voluntary workers numbering from 2,000 to 2,500 on every day. Their wages on a conservative estimate would have amounted to Rs. 1,60,000. The construction of the drain was necessitated by the flooding of the Ujina Lake, situated 6 miles to the south-east of Nuh Town.

* * *

The Villagers of Khara in Kotkapura development block have started a dispensary through self-help. To begin with, each family paid Rs. 6. Out of the money thus collected, Rs. 500 were spent on medicines. A whole-time hakim was engaged.

* * *

The Centre has asked the State Governments to formulate model by-laws relating to the functions of service co-operatives by January 1, 1960, and formulate schemes with a view to achieving universal membership by the end of March next.

* * *

One Hundred and eighty persons interested in community development work participated in a three-week refresher course which began at six centres in the country on September 10. Of these, 30 were non-officials, including M.L.As, presidents of block development committees and panchayats. The training was mainly meant for block development officers and others connected with developmental activities. The refresher course was to acquaint the trainees with the techniques and philosophy of the community development programme. The centres selected for the training were Nilokheri, Ranchi, Hyderabad, Bakshi-Ka-Talab (near Lucknow), Udaipur and Mysore.

* * *

The Programme of the National Co-operative Development and Warehousing Board for 1957-58 was achieved in full except with regard to primary marketing societies and their godowns.

The Rajasthan MLAs have been given the right to attend meetings of the panchayat samitis and take part in their deliberations. However, they will have no right of voting or being elected as 'pradhan' or any other officers.

* * *

All The Villages of Mathura district are now covered by co-operative societies. Seventeen large societies advanced loans of Rs. 31 lakhs to farmers, and supplied 1,90,578 maunds of grain to marketing societies.

* * *

The Punjab Government has taken up the task of regularising the affairs of 460 co-operative land societies of Scheduled Castes, formed hurriedly in former PEPSU on the eve of integration of States in November, 1956.

VIKAS MELAS

(Continued from page 14)

money and energy invested in preparation of the exhibits are lost if their meaning is not explained to the visitors.

OPENING AND CLOSING

There is a tradition to get the Mela inaugurated by some high officer. It would fit in with the spirit of the Community Development programme if this honour is given to the best farmer or best village leader of the Block. Similarly the prizes may be distributed by the 'Pradhan' of the best village. This democratic approach will definitely pave the way for giving right honour to the matter.

EDITOR'S POST BOX

Question : There are far too many Study Camps and Study Teams. Do we have to study so much at a time when urgent action is called for?

Answer : New policies of a fundamental nature cannot be put through without a proper understanding of the conditions in the field. So it is only natural that every action that we contemplate in the field of Community Development is preceded by detailed study; in many cases even when action is being taken, Study Teams and Seminars actively help in the process of action. The Camps and the Teams are the true laboratories in which new ideas are tested, to the extent possible. This does not mean that all Study Camps and Study Teams held under the programme are worthwhile or are properly planned and executed. There have been cases of duplication, unnecessary experiment and unimaginative planning. These are things which the project workers have to guard against.

Question : Do you think the Jeep has been an unmixed blessing to Block activity?

Answer : The Jeep has come in for a good deal of criticism as much from the Block staff as from the public. There is no denying the inestimable service it has done in opening up the windows of rural life to the outside world. It has also opened up to the VIPs,—both foreign and Indian—a new vista of rural life humming with activity. It has helped the Block staff in executing its targets according to schedule. It has brought to the farmers improved seeds, implements and pesticides when they needed them most. This is not to say that it has never been misused or abused by the Block staff. The criticism is not so much against the jeep itself as much against its misuse. Let us be clear about its intrinsic value. There can be no unmixed blessings in this world. When power is passed on from Block office to the Block Panchayat Samiti, things may improve as one expects more intensive public scrutiny of the day-to-day activity of the Block staff.

Question : What is the safeguard that the Block Panchayat Samiti will not usurp the powers of individual Panchayats?

Answer : The control of the Block Panchayat Samiti over the Panchayats will be restricted to seeing that they conform to the agreed pattern of budget and expenditure. Care is being taken in every State that the Block Samiti does not dominate over the Panchayat. Everything will depend to a large extent on the personality and efficiency of the Sarpanches whose training is being carried out on a large scale all over the country.

Question : Is not the Zila Parishad as envisaged in the scheme of Democratic Decentralisation a "wasteful decoration or a source of great mischief"?

Answer : District administrations in this country have a past history and proved their usefulness in their own time. We are now setting up Block administrations which will ultimately grow to their full stature. The gap between the Block and the State Headquarters is too wide and cannot remain unfilled. The Zila Parishad as at present contemplated will have more supervisory powers than executive functions. Their power for mischief, if any, is sought to be met by investing the Block Panchayat Samiti with large powers of administration in its own area.

Improved farming practices are getting more and more popular in the countryside.

As agricultural production improves, new technical skills are learnt.

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